



La Vita è Bella
**Bob Mintzer/Dado Moroni/Riccardo Fioravanti/
 Joe La Barbera (Abeat)**
Canyon Cove **Bob Mintzer (Pony Canyon/Cheetah)**
Live in Berlin Stone Alliance (PM)
 by Ken Dryden

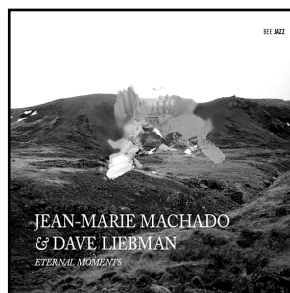
Bob Mintzer has spent several decades as a performer, with an extensive discography as a sideman in a variety of music styles, in addition to his career as a leader of both small groups and an acclaimed big band. Among the many artists whom he has played or recorded with are Buddy Rich, the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, Jaco Pastorius, Randy Brecker, Sam Jones and Nancy Wilson. Primarily known for his work as a tenor saxophonist, Bob Mintzer is also an accomplished bass clarinetist.

On *La Vita è Bella*, Mintzer sticks to tenor sax in undated recordings made at Art Blakey's Jazz Club in Busto Arsizio, Italy, joined by Dado Moroni (one of Europe's top pianists), bassist Riccardo Fioravanti and drummer Joe La Barbera (who worked in the late Bill Evans' final trio). The brief liner notes give no indication if this was a working band at the time or one put together for just a few performances, but the members of the quartet are very much in tune with each other. Mintzer penned the driving blues "The Gathering", a potent postbop vehicle full of solid solos, along with "Re Re", a playful reworking of the chord changes to "(Back Home Again in) Indiana". La Barbera's "Kind of Bill" is a straight-forward tribute to Evans, drawing from both his "Blue in Green" and the standard "I'll Be Seeing You" in a dazzling manner where Moroni seems to channel Evans' spirit, with the band making a delayed entrance marked by Mintzer's heartfelt solo. Fioravanti's ballad "Ninna Anna" is a gorgeous waltz while Moroni's "Bradley's, 2 AM?" gives his interpretation of what a late evening set at the famed, long departed Manhattan night club was like. The gently swaying bossa nova setting of the title track (the theme from the Oscar-winning film *Life is Beautiful*) and a sizzling rendition of the standard "Invitation", with Mintzer and Moroni respectively showing the influence of John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner, round out this exciting live release.

Mintzer is in top form in *Canyon Cove*, a trio session with in-demand organist Larry Goldings and seasoned drummer Peter Erskine. Mintzer, who composed eight originals and arranged everything, is heard on tenor sax, bass clarinet and flute (the latter used as a backing instrument). The peppy "Somewhere Up There" recalls the heyday of tenor sax-organ trios, with Mintzer's robust solo buoyed by Goldings' sparse, punchy chords and Erskine's driving percussion. His warm ballad "Truth" proves to be very catchy; perhaps it will provoke someone to pen a lyric. The uptempo blues "Bebop Special" showcases Mintzer's intricate bass clarinet (adding harmony on flute in spots), making it clear that Mintzer is one of the most underrated players of the instrument. Judd Miller is added on the EWI (electronic wind instrument) on three lively and distinctly different improvisations that feature Mintzer on bass clarinet. The one standard is "When I Fall in Love", a tenor feature played in a breezy setting. While many reed/organ/drum trios quickly grow stale, this brilliant effort is buoyed by Mintzer's strengths as a songwriter and the interaction of the musicians.

Stone Alliance was a fusion band of the late '70s and early '80s centered around electric bassist Gene Perla, with personnel that varied over time. This 1980 set at the Berlin Jazz Festival is previously unissued, featuring Mintzer (tenor and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet, flute and percussion), Kenny Kirkland (piano, keyboards and percussion), Don Alias (drums and congas), plus guest Jan Hammer on keyboards. This fusion-oriented set suffers from rather muddy sound, at times sounding like a bootleg, plus rather uneven songwriting, with many of the songs not really holding one's interest. Alias' compositions are particularly dated, especially the tedious funky "Georgia O'" and the Weather Report-flavored "Risa" with flashy yet uninspired keyboards and what sounds like electronically modified bass clarinet, along with Alias' overly long "Conga Solo". There are a few bright moments. Hammer guests on his own composition "Advantage", a hip trio feature with bass and drums, and Perla's swaggering "Miss T" showcases Mintzer's burning tenor and a potent Kirkland piano solo. This set will be of interest to vintage fusion fans.

For more information, visit abeatrecords.com, ponycanyon.co.jp and pmrecords.org. Mintzer is at *Blue Note Feb. 1st-6th with The Yellowjackets*. See Calendar.



Eternal Moments
**Jean-Marie Machado/
 Dave Liebman**
 (Bee Jazz)

by Gordon Marshall

Well, the saxophone is louder than the piano, but the piano has safety in numbers on its side. Not to say they are always in competition, but in some form or other there is always a question, in a duo format, of whether the two instruments take turns leading or if they engage, alternately, in some equal-but-different entente. To be sure, the piano is technically a rhythm instrument but, as often as not, outside of its association with bass and drums, it can betray that status and covertly shift the playing field. The permutations of these possibilities are outlined in two recent sax/piano releases.

Eternal Moments is an album that builds, through its course, from a very mellow, airy stillness to an ultimately Coltrane-like intensity. Pianist Jean-Marie Machado has a range of tones and approaches embracing lightness and humor, wistfulness and desolation, darkness and depth. Dave Liebman, on his variety of saxes, matches him note for note with his ability to inflect the songs with shades drawn from various modes of world jazz. What is most remarkable is the way the two augment each other in emotion and style, Machado for example, in his own "Les Yeux de Tangati", magnifying Liebman's implied moods as they shift like an autumn sky.

One particular triumph is their appropriation of the Maurice Ravel song "Le Réveil de la Mariée". It demonstrates a thorough comprehension of 19th Century continental conventions and just as thoroughly roots a swinging improvisational theme throughout that deepens and darkens and broadens, tumbling and stumbling but always landing on its feet, just like Parisian saltimbancs. Conversely, the Monk number "Ugly Beauty" is given an Impressionist makeover, delineating the aesthetic descent of Monk, in a large way, from Erik Satie. Liebman's "Fuschia",

with its tie-in to Sam Rivers ("Fuschia Swing Song"), is where things get hot and heavy. But only halfway through, after a long, subdued piano intro that belies the hot modal workout to follow.

Hot tension and competition is indeed suggested on *Reciprocal Uncles*. The competition is recreational, as it were, and pianist Gianni Lenoci and saxist Gianni Mimmo never come to blows. Rather, they are as sporting as two fencing partners. What it lacks for in grand, communal emotion it makes up for in percussive and lyrical invention. In the earlier numbers the tensions are often resolved by one player allowing the other to dominate or, sometimes, in standoffs, where one will drop out entirely as the other solos. The dynamics throughout are fun and swinging.

It is the later numbers that offer resolutions - and revolutions - turning the tensions into forays of breathtaking complexity. "Sparse Lyrics" begins with a plaintive but swinging soprano over a lean, abstracted piano. The two come together then drift apart, repeatedly. As they compete for the lead, one circles the other as in an electron orbit. Then, the piano starts pumping out separate melodies in both bass and treble, dividing the soprano's attention, now following one and then the other. In "News from the Distance" beginning with hard percussion from both instruments, the piano sometimes thwarts and sometimes follows the soprano. Ultimately it takes the lead and runs with it to an entirely other place, mostly in the bass - but so far, as in a 360 turn, it starts to follow again.

For more information, visit myspace.com/beejazzrecords and longsongrecords.com. Liebman is at *Birdland Feb. 1st-5th and 22nd-26th*. Lenoci and Mimmo are at *ABC No Rio Feb. 20th and Issue Project Room Feb. 23rd*. See Calendar.

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9:30pm-2:30am \$10 Cover/\$16 Drink Min.

Tuesdays - Joey Morant 8:00pm-12am
\$10 Cover/\$16 Drink Min.

Wednesdays - Nate Lucas Organ Trio 8:00pm-12am
\$3 Table Cover per person/\$16 Drink Min.

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Comedian Paul Mooney "Live In Harlem"
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